

Topic 2: slaughterhouse five

Experience, Meaning of Life



Topic 2: Slaughterhouse Five In Slaughterhouse Five, Vonnegut shows a lot of hopelessness in showing continuous death and war. He breaks the notion that there are “ good guys” and “ bad guys” in war by showing that all humans have a capacity for evil. In addition, he gives us the notion that people are capable of doing incredibly evil deeds. We can see this in Lazarro when he tells a story to Billy about a time when a dog bites him. Lazarro acting in revenge sticks razor blades into a steak and feeds it to the dog, then looks on with vicious joy as the dog goes into pain, bleeding internally. Vonnegut used this character to express how wicked people can be when Lazarro says, “ anybody asks you what the sweetest thing in life is...it’s revenge” (177). Despite this inevitable truth of humans having an inner capacity for doing evil in this world, Vonnegut also sheds light upon humanity’s capability of good. Such as in the scene in when Billy along with ninety-nine other POWs and four German guards survive by hiding in an underground meat cellar. A blind innkeeper, who was fortunate not to have his hotel destroyed by the bombing, welcomes all the men to stay in his stable overnight, “ Good night, Americans,’ he said in German. ‘ Sleep Well.” (232). This shows that Vonnegut projects a message that there should be a conviction of that people must treat each other well, if humankind is ever going to overcome such hard times. Hence, in this implication we know that he didn’t want to emphasize to his readers that the human race is a lost cause. That there is good in this world but it all depends on the human condition. This is in relation to the coherent biblical references Vonnegut embeds in this story where we see that Adam and Eve revolve around this idea of the human condition. This condition is of good and evil, depending on

what the heart is rooted upon. In this story Vonnegut embeds hope into his message which is having free will. The Trafmadorians talk about " free will" with Billy. " If I hadn't spent so much time studying Earthlings...I wouldn't have any idea what was meant by ' free will'...only on Earth is there any talk of free will (Vonnegut 86)". Here we see that Vonnegut wanted to show to the reader that humans have freedom and the power to shape their own present and future. Nevertheless, we see the author integrating two dynamic characteristics in human nature such as good and bad. In this story we see many characters that represent the human nature that inclines to evil. One of the characters name is general Bertram Copeland Rumfoord who treated Billy indifferently. When Billy was in the hospital as a result of the plane crash, Rumfoord treated him maliciously and with contempt. He considers " Billy a repulsive nonperson who would be much better off dead, " and tells the hospital staff that " people who are weak deserve to die. " Despite the array of evil characters in this story that Vonnegut integrates, he actually gives a notion that there is hope in finding good in this world. Even though there were negative effects of the war and the people Billy encountered he found a way to deal with it through the Trafmadorians. The Tramadorians see the world in four dimensions, meaning they can look at all points in time whenever they like. But humans are limited in just being able to see the past and present unlike these aliens that can see the future. When they encounter adverse circumstances they simply look back or into the future and " live" in one of the better times. One thing is certain-all moments simply exist and they cannot be changed. Hence we tend to see this in Billy where he moves on or stays in a better time of his life than he is actually

going through. This philosophy that Billy adopts relates to why "so it goes" persistently is shown through deaths because he knows that person or animal is living in other events in their lives. In addition this philosophy is positive and is hopeful for the better of our lives even though Billy's daughter Barbara calls him a child in believing in this concept of time. We see that Vonnegut wanted to contrast the mind of a child and an adult where we clearly see differences in their outlook upon life. The author was trying to project a message through this philosophy of the Tralfamadorians where we can remember the best moments of our lives. Moments where we store them deep within our hearts through which we can retain again whenever we need such moments to fill up the reality of whatever we may go through in life. Hope amidst trials, knowing that somewhere, a better time exists and can always be stored and found again in our hearts. The cruel side of human nature is vastly shown in this story through the characters Vonnegut displays whether it's Edgar Derby getting shot by a fire squad "for taking a teapot" or Lazarro pledging to murder one day those who insulted him or his friends during the war. Despite Vonnegut emphasizing the truth of human nature and mindless cruelty he also put light upon the goodness of humans. That we choose to use common sense and act "decently" because we have our own will. There is a will to act "decently" in this society such as Billy did just being a normal and passive man or to act cruel like Lazaroo. This war story obviously entailed many deaths making it difficult as a reader to have a hopeful outlook for the future of mankind. However, Vonnegut offers his belief upon humanity that is hopeful and encouraging. This belief is about the individual having the ability to determine their own fate in midst of a

horrific and terrible world. Through the philosophical ideal of the
Trafmadorians of an optimistic outlook of a future that is better than the
present or rather anything that is not of good. Vonnegut simply wanted to
embed the reality of humanity but yet offer his belief that there is still good
in humans but we just need to let our will pertain to that.